

Letter to the Editor: Addressing Children's Mental Health Issues Related to Economic Changes Caused by the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Dear Editor,

In a recent article published in this journal, the authors insightfully examined the associations of economic deterioration (ED) caused by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and low socioeconomic status (SES) with adolescents' suicidal behaviors. Their findings revealed that ED and low SES were significantly associated with suicidal behaviors in adolescents; thus, special attention is needed for this group [1]. This result is indeed alarming since it is surprising to know that experiencing poverty during this pandemic could result in suicidal behavior in adolescents. The most common mental health issues experienced by the young are stress, anxiety, and depression, and these are mostly rooted in infectious disease, social disconnection, bereavement, or even unexpected and prolonged suspension of in-person learning—but not primarily with ED or low SES. In light of these findings, it is indeed necessary to find ways to address this issue for the benefit of the younger population.

The pandemic certainly caused serious economic changes globally. Due to the lockdown and the risk of spreading COVID-19, the manufacturing of essential goods has slowed down, the supply chain of products has been disrupted, and national

and international businesses have faced losses. The cash flow in the market is poor, slowing down the revenue growth in the economy, and millions of workers have lost their jobs as industries have shut down. The gross domestic product of many economies was affected due to production in industries being disrupted [2]. For families, some parents have lost their jobs and sources of income; thus, their children have suffered from these many deprivations. The pandemic could increase the number of children living in monetarily poor households by more than 142 million by the end of 2020, and this would bring the total number of children living in monetarily poor households globally to just over 725 million [3]. According to the latest available data, more than 1 in 7 adolescents aged 10-19 is estimated to live with a diagnosed mental disorder globally. Almost 46 000 adolescents die from suicide each year, and suicide is among the top 5 causes of death for their age group [4].

To address the mental health problems experienced by the young associated with ED and low SES, integrated interventions are necessary. First, primary care providers play a crucial role in the detection and management of the ones affected through clinical decision-support methods (CDSMs), which are either computer-based or involve telecommunication. CDSMs analyze patients' conditions and provide support regarding treatment or referral. Computer-based CDSMs focus on self-help, diagnosis, and treatment suggestions, while telecommunication methods offer support using interdisciplinary (video) calls [5]. Second, equally important is the availability of mental health services that cater to the needs of the young, be it in-person or online. This can also include parenting programs that promote positive relationships to help them with the ap-

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appropriate way of handling critical situations to prevent traumatic reactions from their children. Here, major institutions like the government, schools, churches/religious organizations, and private companies can collaboratively organize such services that are guided in the spirit of social responsibility. Third, since unemployed parents are one of the major causes of mental health problems among children, since their basic needs are not met, the government and private sectors must create alternative jobs for them to avoid disrupting for a longer period their source of income. It follows that the government's labor department must increase its annual budget for contingency measures. Lastly, addressing corruption in the government can help sustain sufficient budgetary resources that are supposed to be allotted to fund mental health services and create more employment for parents. Anti-corruption programs and accountability measures must be strengthened to at least minimize, if not stop, the dishonest management of funds.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author has no conflicts of interest associated with the material presented in this paper.

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